

Carl Sandburg: The One Who Could Do It All

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On January 6, 1878, a future famous writer was born in Galesburg, Illinois. This author would be acknowledged in history forever. Carl Sandburg not only was a writer, but was also known as a poet, historian, biographer, autobiographer, journalist, novelist, a children's writer and a folklorist.

Sandburg's parents, who were Swedish immigrants, struggled with financial problems. Sandburg was forced to drop out of school after the eighth grade to support his family by working various jobs such as delivering milk, shining shoes, laying bricks, washing dishes and painting windows. At the age of seventeen, he traveled as a hobo. A few years later, Sandburg, at age twenty, served in the Spanish-American War.

As a result of his jobs and traveling experiences, he was inspired to write about various things. Although Sandburg attended Lombard College, he did not graduate. However, it was at Lombard where he met Professor Phillip Green Wright who inspired him and paid, in 1904, to have his first poetry book published, Reckless Ecstasy.

As a journalist, he worked many different jobs. In 1905, he worked for Chicago's Tomorrow Magazine. In 1907, he became the associate editor of the *Lyceumite*, where he published "A Dream Girl" and "Unimportant Portraits of Important People." Sandburg also worked as a reporter for the Chicago Daily News from 1917 to 1918 and then again from 1919 to 1932, reporting on things such as strikes and picket lines and also incidents about race. Sandburg wrote for the lower- to middle-class working

families, seeking social justice for these families. He wrote for the people who could not speak for themselves.

As a journalist, Sandburg wrote many biographies. His most famous was Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years. It brought him many awards and honors. This allowed Sandburg the financial security to leave his newspaper position. This was only half a biography of Lincoln because the completion of his life took another ten years. His writings on Lincoln were eventually completed in six volumes.

Sandburg also loved to write poetry; he took an interest in everyday conversations of ordinary people. From these conversations, he used metaphors and colorful idioms. He gathered ideas from anywhere he could for his poetry. He loved to experiment. Some poems Sandburg kept simple, while others were more complex. Throughout his career, he wrote and published more than nine hundred poems. His most famous was called, "Fog." Though this poem was very short, it showed his "simplicity of expression." Other famous poems included "Chicago" and "The People, Yes."

Before he became famous, and while traveling as a hobo, Sandburg wrote many folk songs. In 1927, a collection of folk songs were published: "The American Songbag." In 1950, The New American Songbag was published. Sandburg wrote many songs and loved to perform in front of audiences with his banjo or guitar.

In a recent e-mail correspondence, I talked with Nancy Brokaw, an Illinois author who specializes in children's fiction and creative non-fiction. She noted, "I read Carl Sandburg as a child and was impressed with how strong and muscular his poetry seemed to be. While he can also be lyrical, I think he captures an inherent Midwestern strength that comes from living close to the land, even in Chicago, 'Hog Butcher to the World'."

Sandburg received two Pulitzer Prizes for his works. These works included Abraham Lincoln: The War Years (1939) and his Complete Poems in (1950). In addition, he received many other awards and recognitions. In Chicago, Illinois, on his seventy-fifth birthday (January 6, 1953), “Carl Sandburg Day” was declared. Many schools have been named after him across the country from one in San Bruno, California to another in Rockville, Maryland. Carl Sandburg died on July 22, 1967. However, his legacy will live on through his writings. This author will forever be remembered. [From Books and Writers, “Carl Sandburg (1878-1967),” www.krijasto.sci.fi/sandburg.htm (Nov. 16, 2005); N. S. Brokaw, E-mail correspondence, Nov. 18 and 19, 2005; H. Golden, Carl Sandburg; J. H. Hacker, Carl Sandburg; H. Mitgang, The Letters of Carl Sandburg; Representative Poetry, “Selected Poetry of Carl Sandburg (1878-1967)” <http://eir.library.utoronto.ca/rpo/display/poet287.html> (Nov. 16, 2005).]